PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Minutes of Meeting
May 22, 2019

The meeting was called to order by President Stephanie Najjar at 7:00pm. President Najjar noted the meeting was being recorded by Recording Secretary Allison Lytle.

As there was a quorum present, the roll call was taken:

Present	**Absent**
Anne Quinn	Sandra Fecteau
Stephanie Najjar	
Dianne Caputo	
Wes Merrill	
Jean Ahearn	
Thomas Pappas	
Frances Bisazza-Gallugi	
Richard Shruhan	
Kate O'Brien	
Don McAllister	

President Najjar stated they would be interviewing one candidate, Cate Merlin, for the position of Assistant Library Director that evening. President Najjar provided the Board a copy of her resume and a list of questions they would be asking Ms. Merlin during the interview.

Trustee Anne Quinn inquired as to the process by which they chose to forward only one candidate to the entire Board to interview. Trustee Quinn inquired as to how many candidates applied, how many were interviewed, and how the committee settled on one candidate to the Board as they had previously stated their goal would be to have two final candidates for the Trustees to interview.

President Najjar reported there were nine applicants for the position. The Assistant Library Director Search Committee reviewed the resumes and candidates and agreed they wanted to interview three candidates for the position. The Search Committee interviewed the three candidates and were confident in their choice to forward Cate Merlin to the Board for the final interview. President Najjar stated that while the other candidates were qualified, they felt strongly about the candidate they were bringing in that evening. In response to a question from the Board, President Najjar explained that while they were only interviewing one candidate, Ms. Merlin did need to receive a majority of the vote of the Board and that without a majority, she would not be offered the position and the process would start again.

President Najjar introduced candidate Cate Merlin to the Board.

1. Briefly summarize your professional background as a librarian, with a focus on your administrative responsibilities.

Cate Merlin stated she had been working at the Peabody Institute Library for four and a half years and began overseeing the Teen Department and the Creativity Lab. Prior to her position at the PIL, Ms. Merlin worked as the Young Adult Services Librarian at the Attleboro Public Library and basically built the teen department from scratch as she was responsible for coming up with the collection and all the programming for the department.

Ms. Merlin stated she had a lot of administrative responsibilities as part of her position in the Teen Department including overseeing two part-time aides and the summer interns every summer. Ms. Merlin stated she ran the summer food program which served approximately 1,200 lunches and 800 snacks every summer and involved a lot of administrative work to organize. Ms. Merlin reported for the last seven months she had worked at the public service desk when they moved to a single service model and oversaw the staff of 10-12 people. Her position also involved checking in and training staff and day to day administrative work as the desk was a "one stop shop" for all services for the Library.

2. What are three of the most important issues facing public libraries today?

Ms. Merlin stated that one of the most serious issues facing the Peabody Institute Library in particular was funding. Ms. Merlin stated that libraries faced the issue in general that they had to prove their worth constantly. Ms. Merlin stated she thought it was very important that libraries were able to get their funding organizations to understand their inherent worth.

Ms. Merlin stated that a second issue facing public libraries was the perception that libraries were outdated given the internet. Ms. Merlin stated that she didn't think that was the case particularly with the PIL as they had changed their model to work with the internet and technology and also built online resources and programming to overcome that stigma.

Ms. Merlin stated that a third important issue was population changes. The PIL and libraries in general needed to figure out how to service English language learners and the foreign language population.

Trustee Anne Quinn stated that she knew the Conversation Circles programs were successful but inquired as to how the Library determined how they would prioritize English versus non-English programming given their current budgetary issues.

Ms. Merlin stated that Conversation Circles really was a wonderful program and the Library was able to see the affect it had for people who were learning to speak English. Ms. Merlin stated that many of the participants in the program were trying to improve their English and were trying to get jobs. The Library also referred people to NASCAP and other places that held more formal English classes for patrons who needed or wanted additional English instruction. Ms. Merlin stated that while she would love to offer more English language classes

for that population, right now she felt the Library struck a good balance as they were serving their English language learning population with a program that was not a lot of work administratively. Ms. Merlin explained that in the future in order to expand their programming for the ELL population she would ideally like to bring in more outside services. At that point the Library would be providing the space and facilities and it would not require a lot of training or internal resources, but they would be offering valuable services.

3. If you were offered this position, what would be your top three priorities and how would you prioritize them?

Ms. Merlin stated that her top priority would be to keep up staff morale, especially starting on July 1st when the proposed budget cuts would take effect. Ms. Merlin stated that whatever cuts the Library ultimately faced, it was going to be tough on the staff as people's jobs and duties would be reassigned and jobs would not be what the staff were really used to them being. Ms. Merlin stated that one of the Assistant Library Director's main duties was staff management and in order to keep the core services at the excellent level they currently were at they would need to keep staff morale up. Ms. Merlin stated it was important to thank people for their work and for going outside their comfort zone as things changed with the new budgetary restrictions. Ms. Merlin stated she thought it was important for the staff to know that management was supporting them and that what they were doing for the Library was appreciated.

Ms. Merlin stated a second priority would be to offer more English language classes, more Conversation Circles, and citizenship classes. Ms. Merlin stated she would also love to offer integration training if possible.

Ms. Merlin stated that she would also like to address the programming space at the Main Branch. Ms. Merlin stated the children's programming room was difficult as they didn't really have a space that could house a program of more than 10 kids. The Library also didn't have a big room that could host big community events given that the Sutton Room was not always an appropriate space for such events.

4. What are some of the unique service populations that the library can service and how can that service be provided?

Ms. Merlin stated that as she had described previously, one of Peabody's unique populations was their English language learners and new residents.

Ms. Merlin stated that one unique population that was near and dear to her heart was teenagers. Ms. Merlin stated that the PIL had such a big, dedicated space for the teens and they had great dedicated staff. Ms. Merlin explained that one of the difficult things for the teen population was that they couldn't advocate for themselves. Ms. Merlin explained that for the young children, their parents advocated for them; and adults advocated for themselves and their needs. Ms. Merlin stated that for a lot of the teenagers that spent a lot of time at the Library they didn't have very involved parents. Ms. Merlin stated that as that was the case, she would like to expand teen programming and also improve the teen space at the South and West Branch.

Ms. Merlin stated that the Library hosted special needs kids, adults and teenagers and she thought there was more they could do to service that population, including perhaps offering such things as Adult 101 classes which would teach budgeting, life skills, etc. Ms. Merlin stated that the Library could reach out to outside volunteers to provide classes for that population.

Ms. Merlin stated the Library also hosted some of Peabody's homeless population and providing more outreach to them was important. The staff at the Library got to know them very well as they spent a lot of time on the third floor of the Library, particularly in the winter. Ms. Merlin stated that they recently started working with a task force on homelessness in Peabody and they were looking to ideally bring in a social worker to assist They would like to provide them with more outreach through a skilled social worker who could assist them with food, housing assistance, or other needs. Ms. Merlin stated that if they could bring in a volunteer social worker with experience with the homeless population perhaps once a week, the Library could provide a valuable service.

5. How can the library do a better job supporting diversity in the workforce and in its community services?

Ms. Merlin stated that it was just a fact that most librarians were middle aged, middle class, white females and the PIL's librarian population was reflective of that statistic. Ms. Merlin stated she did think it was important that the library staff reflected the population of the city they were in but it was not the case at that time. Ms. Merlin stated that perhaps updating job descriptions to include looking for people with fluency in Spanish or Portuguese would bring in more diversity. Ms. Merlin stated that if someone was a recent graduate from school and were specifically looking for a position with a bilingual requirement, they would not apply for a position in Peabody that did not state they were looking for that skill. Ms. Merlin stated she also thought the Library needed to do more outreach to find out what underrepresented communities wanted or needed from the Library.

6. What experience do you have with a unionized workforce? How would these inform your management style?

Ms. Merlin stated that her only experience had been working at the Library as a union member. Ms. Merlin stated that she had previously been interested in becoming a union rep but it didn't work out but through that she learned that the union and management needed to be involved in all big decisions. Ms. Merlin stated she believed that the union and management had to work hand in hand. In terms of management style, she thought that management couldn't make a unilateral decision without explanation as that was when those decisions would be challenged at the next level. Ms. Merlin stated she thought it was important to walk through all of the issues and work together on big decisions.

Ms. Merlin stated that as a union member she had benefited from being in the union as she had been able to obtain positions through her seniority but she could see the other side.

Ms. Merlin stated that there was a recent supreme court decision that stated that someone could not be forced to join a union so now all library staff members had a choice as to whether or not to join their respective unions. Ms. Merlin stated that it was an interesting process last year when the decision from the supreme court came down to watch the decision-making process of the staff when deciding whether or not to join.

7. Tell us about a time you were forced to make an unpopular decision and how you handled the consequences.

Ms. Merlin stated that when she was the Teen Librarian they switched the categorization of the collection from the traditional cataloging method to the BISAC system. Ms. Merlin stated that while it seemed like a minor issue, it was a big deal at the time and was not supported by all the staff. Ms. Merlin stated that her rationale for making the decision was that the BISAC system was a lot more user-friendly and easier for the teen patrons to find what they were looking for and would make books more accessible to them. Ms. Merlin stated that she thought that if a teen had to ask the library staff to help them find a book on an uncomfortable topic, such as puberty, they wouldn't do so. Ms. Merlin stated that while she thought she as making an informed decision, the staff didn't speak to her about the decision directly when they had issues with it. Ms. Merlin stated that once she explained the rationale behind the decision they were accepting of the change and they were able to move forward. Ms. Merlin stated that while there would always be push back when there was change, she thought if someone could explain why the change was being made and what informed the decision it would be more easily accepted. Ms. Merlin stated that it was important to listen and acknowledge any rebuttal to the decision but in the end, she was the supervisor and had to make what she thought would be the best decision.

8. What techniques would you use to improve employee morale?

The Board agreed Ms. Merlin had answered this question during her response to Question #3.

9. Tell us about a time that you surmounted a major obstacle.

Ms. Merlin stated that she left college before graduating as she was not ready to be there and finish her degree. Ms. Merlin stated that subsequent to leaving college, she didn't have clear career goals and no direction. She faced a moment of feeling like nothing. Ms. Merlin stated she then learned about library school and went back to college at the age of 29. Ms. Merlin stated that when she went back to school, she was in class with 19-year old students and the embarrassment of having not completed college earlier was a surprisingly hard obstacle to overcome. Ms. Merlin stated that after dropping out of college it was a 10-year process of discovery which led her back to school where she finished her degree and began her career.

Trustee Anne Quinn stated that it sounded from what Ms. Merlin had told them about herself that she was a very proactive and service-oriented, public-oriented librarian. As that was the case, Trustee Quinn inquired as to how Ms. Merlin thought she would do as the Assistant Library Director as she envisioned that position as more of a back of the house position.

Ms. Merlin stated that the position she was in currently was very much a back of the office position. Ms. Merlin stated that she was not on the public service desk and she was surprised at how much she liked it. She liked the big picture thinking of the Assistant Library Director position, keeping the day-to-day logistics going so that the librarians and staff could work at the best of their ability without having to worry about such things as ordering supplies, maintenance, etc. Ms. Merlin stated she thought the ALD position offered a good combination of dealing with the staff and the organizational needs of the library. Ms. Merlin stated she loved planning, organizing and managing people so everyone could work efficiently.

10. Which of your professional accomplishments are you most proud?

Ms. Merlin stated she was most proud of the summers she has run during her time at the library. Ms. Merlin explained that the summers in the teen room were intense and exhausting as they were juggling teen interns, volunteers, the food program, summer camps and more during that time and she was proud of what they were able to pull off. Ms. Merlin stated that for the summer food program Haven from Hunger provided the food and they had to get the meals, do all the training, teach teen interns, do paperwork, keep all of the logistics going, set up tables, plan programming, clean up after the food was served and host camps all at the same time. Ms. Merlin stated that while it was tough, the summers were really satisfying, especially as all of the kids and parents were excited by what they were doing.

As there were no additional questions from the Board, President Najjar thanked Ms. Merlin for her time that evening on behalf of the Board.

Ms. Merlin's interview concluded at 7pm.

President Najjar stated that prior to going into executive session to discuss the candidacy of Ms. Merlin, she wanted to hand out a copy of the letter she drafted on behalf of the Board regarding the proposed budget cuts as discussed at the May 6, 2019 meeting. President Najjar stated that she tried to provide as much information as she could regarding the impact the cuts would have on the Library and requested the Board members review the letter and provide her with any feedback. President Najjar stated she would like to include the information Library Director Robinson provided on the visitor statistics, programming numbers, etc., as a handout to go along with the letter.

President Najjar reminded the Trustees to email her directly with feedback on the letter. President Najjar stated she would collect everyone's comments and finalize the letter and have it ready for everyone's signature at the June 3rd Board of Trustees' meeting.

A **MOTION** to move to an Executive Session was made by Don McAllister. The motion was seconded by Frances Bisazza-Gallugi. A vote was taken.

All in Favor: Yes. Any Opposed: No. The motion was unanimously approved.

President Najjar stated the purpose of the Executive Session was to discuss the candidacy of Cate Merlin for the position of Assistant Library Director. President Najjar stated following the discussion, the Board would vote on whether or not to offer the position to Ms. Merlin. President Najjar reminded the Board that the vote needed to be a majority vote and did not need to be unanimous. A Trustee could call for a vote at any time during the session.

The Board discussed Ms. Merlin's candidacy, her background, experience and interview.

Subsequent to the discussion, a **MOTION** was made by Jean Ahearn to hold a roll call vote regarding Cate Merlin for the Assistant Library Director. The motion was seconded by Don McAllister.

The Recording Secretary explained that she would call the name of each Trustee in voting order, at which time the Trustee would voice their vote with a "Yes" vote in favor of offering the position to Ms. Merlin and a "No" vote if opposed.

A Roll Call Vote was taken:

Trustee	**Vote**
Thomas Pappas	Yes
Frances Bisazza-Gallugi	Yes
Jean Ahearn	Yes
Kate O'Brien	Yes
Don McAllister	Yes
Dianne Caputo	Yes
Wes Merrill	Yes
Anne Quinn	Yes
Richard Shruhan	Yes
Stephanie Najjar	Yes

The Board voted to offer the position of Assistant Library Director to candidate Cate Merlin by a vote of 10 votes in favor, 0 opposed.

As there was no further discussion or matters for the Board, a **MOTION** was made by Don McAllister to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Wes Merrill. A vote was taken.
All in Favor: Yes. Any Opposed: No. The motion was unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20pm.

Submitted by,

Allison M. Lytle
Recording Secretary